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## SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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Brooklyn, January, 1869.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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## THE DEPARTED CHRIST.

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“It is expedient for you that I go away.”—Jno. xvi., 7.

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The last scenes of our Lord upon earth defy exposition. His own soul rose so manifestly into the higher realm; his presentation of truth became so ethereal; it was so far above the level of interpretation, that it is extremely difficult to follow his discourses, which seem enigmatical, mystical, and, from their very brightness, obscure. There is no part of the closing history of the Saviour's life that is more wonderful than the record which John makes of his last interviews with his disciples. All those clustering chapters of John—the 15th, the 16th, the 17th, and on—were a part of the great event of the Supper. They were the conversations which took place at the time of the Supper, and in intimate connection with it. They are full of what may be called a love-lore, such as is to be found in no other literature, and such as refuses to be interpreted by the ordinary love-literature of human society. Such love, so high, so full of divine intellection, so full of spiritual impulse, so full of regrets tempered by a better knowledge, so full of aspiration, so full of faith, so tender, so gentle, touching the human soul on all sides so potently—I know not where we shall look for anything, till we hear it from the lips of God in heaven, that can be compared with it as it is represented in those chapters in John—chapters which have this trouble: that they are like fruit-trees which grow so high that children, stepping under them,

can only take windfalls, being unable to reach up into the boughs, where the fruit is ripest, and where the sun has given it its best colors. Men are so small, and the tree is so high, that it is only through the medium of higher forms of experience, which are not given to all, and which are seldom vouchsafed to any, that one can enter into these discourses and interpret them. I confess that I am stopped in a labor of love, in attempting to unfold the Life of Christ. I have come to the verge of what are called "the forty days"; and the mountains are so high and so dazzling that I hardly know how to climb them, or what to do with them. They reach far above any power that I have; and so I wait, and hope.

It was in one of these conversations that the Saviour declared to his disciples that he must leave them. On him their whole souls had rested. He epitomized to them everything that was sacred; they had forsaken occupation and had suffered contumely for following this man, and now he was about to be taken from them; and everything in their knowledge, everything in their affection, everything in their understanding, rebelled against it. They could not comprehend it either in its relations to him or to themselves. And yet he said, "It is expedient for you [it is for your own interest, it is for your own good] that I go away."

That, I think, touches the universal feeling of wonder in men. Is there one of you who has not, at one time or another, pondered the question, "Why did Christ leave the world? Having once come into it, and brought life and immortality to light, why did he not, in the exercise of infinite divinity, abide in the world?" Although it may be a vague feeling, coming and going, yet, at one time and another, persons spell out good reasons—reasons that are to themselves good—why he should have remained.

There are multitudes who think that if they could but once have seen Jesus with their eyes; or that if, like Thomas, they could have laid their hand on his hand; or that if they could have heard from him the history of his life and the repetition of his instructions, and could have brought away with them from one single visit this sanctified vision, it would have made a difference with them as long as they lived, that

it would have begotten in them a certainty, an enthusiasm, and a power which would have carried them through a thousand sloughs that otherwise must have engulfed them.

Then, again, men think that if once they could learn to pour out their soul's allegiance to Christ, in his very presence, it would change the tenor of their whole lives. They think that if they could once express their feelings in person, the channel of their souls would be filled up, and they could go on all their lives long worshiping and rejoicing in Him to whom they had yielded personal allegiance. They think that if they could erect in their souls a conception of God in Christ, and prostrate their will and affection before it, having seen the substantial Reality, and having pledged their fealty and fidelity to him, this experience would be an anchor that would never give way. They think it would lay the foundations of piety so strong that all doubts and skepticisms would flee from them forever more. And that will not strike you at first as irrational.

Then there is a larger number of persons who feel that if Christ were only alive, enthroned in Jerusalem, around that sacred Center where he would dwell would be formed the church circle in an unbroken unity; that all the shattered particles of shining truth would be gathered together; that those causes by which the truth is broken and rendered fragmentary would be avoided; that the world would grow up into substantial oneness; that there would be no sects; that all would be Christ's men; and that there would be no divisions among them.

Then, again, there is the feeling of certainty which men seek for. There is a desire among men to know the truth, and to know it exactly, without variableness or shadow of turning. This universal desire leads men to feel that if they could have a determiner of controversies, it would be a great and desirable thing. "Yes," they say, "we have the Bible; but then, what is the Bible? It is a forest of glorious trees out of which men have cut sticks and bludgeons for handles of all manner of implements with which to fight each other. Instead of there being a determiner of controversies, to whom men apply for the settlement of their difficulties, we see men

of equal wisdom and scholarship and piety separated and divided on almost every single question. How can the Bible be a determiner of controversies, when, instead of one church being built out of it, there are a dozen different and warring sects that draw their proofs from it, and justify their operations by reference to it?"

There is the vicegerent in Rome; and men say, oftentimes, "We do not believe in a great many things that are claimed in regard to Roman papacy; but, after all, it is a good thing to have somewhere a center of faith—one that can determine and put an end to controversies. It is eminently desirable. And if men receive the truth from one who knows it in all its relations there is nothing to hinder there being unity of faith and belief—a consummation devoutly to be wished."

I think so too, in the way in which the Master spoke of it; but not in the lower way in which men speak of it. Unity according to the Gospel idea is very desirable; but one of the most mischievous things that could have been done would have been to introduce into this world an economy so revolutionary and so different from the original decrees and designs of God as that would be which should point out all the paths of duty, all the lines of industry, and all the elements of belief, and mold them, and present them to men, like so many cakes standing in a baker's shop, so that they could go in and take this truth, or that truth, and find it all ready for them, they having nothing to do but to eat it, and go home and be happy.

This great unity of the church, this absolute identity of beliefs, of which we hear so much—men follow it, and think that if Christ himself, not a man, but divine, in his own person, had remained in Jerusalem, so that every time a doubt arose, a letter might be sent thither and an answer received solving that doubt, or so that when a doctrine came up which could not be fathomed an inquiry could be despatched and an exact reply returned—if there could be a tribunal that should be a kind of encyclopedia in church matters and matters of doctrine—it would settle everything. They think it would unitize men and the church.

And so, for these and many other reasons, it is thought that if Christ had remained on earth his presence would have been an immense gain to the world, and men marvel that he should have gone out of it.

I cannot deny that, at the first blush, there is some sort of justification for these vagrant fancies; but they will not bear examination. God's way is always the best. It is best for the world that Christ left it. It was best for his disciples. It was best for his church. It has been best for the race. Let us consider it,—and first in its simplest and most obvious elements.

If the Saviour had remained, say, at Jerusalem, either there would have been a perpetual miracle of youth, or else by growth he would have reached a monstrous and unnatural age. If he had lived on the earth two thousand years, he would have been so utterly unlike men that he would have grown away from them; and the very supposition contains in it an element which explodes it, for then he could not be to us what he was to his disciples.

Moreover, consider that had he abode upon earth he would have been subject to all the limitations and infirmities of the body. That is to say, he must needs have eaten, and drank, and slept, as men eat and drink and sleep. He must have traveled, as men travel, by instruments. Hours, periods of time, must have had dominion over him. He would have dwelt in what, to him, would have been a prison—for he laid aside the glory which he had with the Father, he emptied himself of his reputation, he became as a man, that he might do a specific work in this world. And for him to have remained a man would have been to remain in an infant condition, as it were, hindered, cramped on every side, as he was in Jerusalem, subject to hunger and thirst, subject to disease, subject to captivity, subject to the ten thousand adverse elements which belong to the lot of humanity. Would it be best that the Head of the church should be thus imprisoned? You might make Jerusalem as gorgeous as you pleased, you might make the mountains surrounding it of layers of gold, you might defend it by armies which should defy the approach of all enemies; but it would not be a fit residence for

the risen Christ. The divine Spirit cannot dwell in a human body, nor under the laws of matter, except as in prison, and manacled. The idea of Christ's taking up his abode permanently on this earth is to me a most humiliating conception.

Further than that, suppose our Master had remained upon earth, abiding in Jerusalem. You plead the benefit that would have been derived from seeing him. How many of the race could have seen him? He would still have been unseen by far the greatest number of men. The ocean may know ways of circulating its waters; the Gulf Stream may find the poles, which no man can find, and flow back again, and incessantly move; the atmosphere may change and go from place to place without vehicle or expense; but there is no grand current by which the human race may be thus carried hither and thither. So the tribes of the earth would find it difficult to go to a certain place and see the Saviour if he were on earth. Moreover, the mere social and physical disturbances would be enormous. The entire customs of society, the industries of men, and national life in every part of the world, would necessarily be totally different if they were to undertake such a thing. As things are, it would break up the household, destroy social intercourse, and subject men to untold perils and toils and wastes and expenses. The simplest attempt to see the Christ under such circumstances would burden men beyond all computation, to say nothing of the destruction of vast multitudes of the human race—witness those fearful pilgrimages in the East, to this day, whose fatal results, in famines, slaughters, and the dreaded Asiatic cholera, scourge the earth.

But let us rise above these wretched considerations of man's physical circumstances, and go higher. Do you suppose, for a single moment, that you would feel any better satisfied if you had seen Christ than you may feel without having seen him? Do you suppose your spiritual life would be unfolded through the eyes as effectually as it is through your understanding and imagination? There is no greater illusion than the supposition that if you could once see God and heaven, the power of that which would come to you through

the eye would be greater than the power of that which comes to you through reason or faith.

Was it so? When the disciples were with Christ day by day, and night after night, were they more strong and more powerful than afterwards they were? You know they were not. The inspiration that lifted them above common humanity came by faith and not by sight. So long as they lived by seeing they lived on a low plane. When they could no longer see, when they were put upon the necessity of imagining, when they began to live toward the invisible realm, then they rose, and then came to pass the promise, that the Spirit, the Comforter, should be given to them. Then there broke an illuminating inspiration upon their souls. Then they became more than ordinary men. But it was not by the power of vision; it was by the power of moral intuition; it was by faith.

It may be said that their faith was derived from the fact that they had once seen Christ; and there can be no question that once having seen Christ worked with them to a certain degree; but there is little doubt that that which was the real power of their ministry was not the reminiscence of a direct inspiration of the Saviour when he was on earth. The sight of Christ did not do for the apostles what his absence did. His presence was sweet when they had it; but his absence was far better for them than his presence. Sense is the antithesis of sentiment. Spirituality is never derived from vision. The higher spiritual growths in men are produced by other means. The materialist, the atheist, in science, would have it all his own way, if we insisted that every spiritual influence came through the senses; but if we deny that, and say that there is given to men interiorly a moral constitution which is illumined by the direct influence of the divine soul acting on ours, then the scientist, if he be atheist and materialist, does not have it all his own way. There are realms of knowledge which cannot be reached by vision, and which must be reached by the spirit. Therefore the Saviour says to his disciples, "It is expedient that I go away; if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you." There is a Holy Ghost—that is, a Holy

Spirit—that is, the Divine Nature in a spiritual form—which rests upon the corresponding moral nature in man, and by which we are developed toward the highest stature ; and that does not come by seeing. Christ said, “ If I remain with you you will be helpless, you will be dependent on me, and you will rise no higher than your eyes can carry you ; but if I leave you, then the Spirit of God, that has in it all light and all interpretations of noble thoughts, shall come, and new developments will take place, and you will be lifted to a higher sphere, and will rest upon a higher plane. It was for their good, then, that he left them.

But again, would there be any more certainty of unity in government and polity if Christ could yet be referred to ? What is the obvious problem of human life ? Is it designed that men shall be brought into this world as nearly correct as possible, and grow more and more symmetrical clear through to the end, and be slid out naturally into their proper places in the other life ? If so, it contradicts every fact in history, and all facts that are extant. For see how men are tumbled into the world like so much gravel-stone and soil. See how they come into life inchoate, unformed, unknowing. Men begin at the lowest point. They develop slowly, imperfectly, little by little, each individual rising through certain stages adapted to himself. And the idea of a man’s coming into life perfectly formed, and then going on without accident or mistake to the end, is, as representing the structural genius of the world, preposterous. There is hardly a fact in the history of men that would go to corroborate such an idea. Men are born low down in the scale of being. They are born with imperfect knowledge. If they would obtain knowledge they must gain it by searching ; by seeking ; by taking responsibility upon themselves ; by the exertion of their faculties. But if all knowledge were prepared so that it could be put upon a man, where would be the chance for exertion on his part to obtain it ? Men earn caution and wisdom ; but if these qualities were inherent in them, what motive would there be to earn them ? If men were made as the potter makes a vessel, giving it a certain shape, and baking it, so that its form cannot be changed, and so that its size is fixed in such a way that if it

is a pint it will be a pint forever, or if it is a quart it will be a quart forever—if men were made and molded so, how could there be any stimulus brought to bear upon them for endeavor ?

The fact is, men are made at zero, and by a process of self-development, by reason of their condition and their necessities, they unfold their characters. It is more or less the stimulus brought to bear, in the providence of God, through their wants, that lifts them up.

You would like it if a house were built for you before you were born. You would like it if, when you came into the world, you found shoes ready made for you ; if you found coats hanging and waiting for you ; if you found tables ready to slide in or to rise up through the floor, covered with all manner of delicious food, and surrounded by airy servitors. And what would *you* do ? Oh, nothing ! And what is a man who does nothing in this world ? A man who does not cry with pain, who does not strive to avoid it, who does not aspire, and who does not work ; a man who is not plied on every hand with motives for the exercise of all his faculties in the development of himself—such a man is not the man God meant to produce in this world. He is not the ideal man of divine providence. This world is a world of anvils, of benches, of plows, of looms, of everything which indicates that men must *work out their own salvation* ; and WORK ! may be said to be the birth-cry of creation to every man that comes into the world.

Now, there are men who are attempting to set up an ideal perfection which thwarts the divine intention. They say, “ If we only had some one in Jerusalem who had authority, and who should be supreme over the church throughout the world, saying, ‘ This is the exact way—walk ye in it,’ how much better it would be ! ” Well, how much better *would* it be ? Would it be any better ? Why, we do not want unity in any such sense as that would imply—that is to say, we do not want mere likeness, mere sameness, mere absence of conflict. I tell you, we have that ; we have men who never quarrel ; we have men who always keep their places—in the graveyard ; and the race would be but little better than dead men if such

unity were to exist, and men did not need to think, to exert themselves, or to make mistakes, which are always incident to investigation and endeavor.

Some people are all the time trying to set aside the divine providence by doing for a man what it was designed that he should do for himself. They think that if we had a church that would take care of a man, so that he would not have to take care of himself; if we had a church which everybody would have to come into first or last, that had just so many Articles, just so long, and in just such sequence, so that all would know just what rules they had to follow, and would find their thoughts and beliefs and lives arranged for them, and put in regular order—they think that if we had such a church, it would be a glorious thing. But what would a man be if we had such a church? He would be about equal to Babbage's calculating machine, so that all that would be necessary would be to turn a crank, the wheels being of just such a diameter, and with just such cogs, but having no volition, no life, no automatic action, no individuality,—no divinity!

Now, although selfishness is a sin, *self*ness is a virtue; and the divine providence is steadily seeking to work out the individual power of manhood by voluntary choices, and by the endeavors and labors of each man.

There is an idea that a great central authority at Jerusalem would have converted this world into a vast machine entirely harmonious with itself, and in perfect unity. Yes, oh yes, I can enter into the conception of it; but I cannot conceive how anybody who has an idea of how the providence of God is unfolding and has unfolded the world should stumble on that as the way in which he ought to unfold it.

But it is thought that, at any rate, it would determine controversies to have one who could speak authoritatively. Would it? Did it? Is it true that the disciples believed just what Christ told them? We know that they did not. Did the most learned and educated men in the time of the Saviour believe what he taught them, when he went up into the temple? We know that they did not. Did the early church that were immediately under his personal influence

believe exactly alike? We know that they did not. Nay, did not he himself say that there were many things which he could not teach them, because they were not large enough to receive them—because they could not hold them? “I have yet many things,” he says, “to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” He recognized distinctly the fact that something more was necessary than to give men a word-statement of the truth—that there must be something more in them before they could receive it.

Take another example. One would think that the fact that Christ must suffer was simple enough. The Old Testament Scriptures pointing that way, and it being a mere physical historical fact, one would suppose that everybody could understand it; and yet his disciples did not comprehend it; and although within three months of his crucifixion he talked of it to them again and again, Peter took him aside and dealt with him [for in that little church there was freedom among the brotherhood: they dared to say, even to their own Master, what they thought]. Peter rebuked him, and said, “It shall not be so: you shall not die; the priests shall not take you and crucify you. You say that you shall be killed, and that after three days you shall rise again; what do you say such things to us for?” Jesus tried to impress that historical physical fact upon his disciples, all the way as they went to Jerusalem, and after they were there; but he failed to make them understand it. And after he was crucified, after he had risen again, they were in a mist of amazement. They could not get it through their heads that the Messiah had suffered and died.

Well, then, was the presence of Christ so successful as a means of indoctrinating men with the truth? Did not the mind act the same then as it does now? and was it not necessary for men to get at the truth by unfolding themselves, and by educating their inward nature to the thing taught them? Take the most moral, the most refined and cultivated, natures of the Saviour’s time. You will observe that his teachings in Galilee were very different from his teachings in Jerusalem. He instructed according to the audience which he addressed. In Galilee there was a kind of cosmopolitan

population. Armies of every nation had been there, and had shed their soldiers, and a mixture of nationalities was the result. You perceive that in Galilee Christ taught truths in their lower forms; but you observe that when he went into Jerusalem, and passed through his conflicts with the priests, and scribes, and rulers, his utterances became very mystical. They said to him, "If you are divine, prove it." What was his answer to them? Substantially this: "You cannot be judges of what is divine. To enable you to know whether or not I am divine requires that there should be more sensibility in you, in order that when you see divinity you will recognize it."

A man says to me, "You claim that to be a beautiful picture: prove that it is beautiful." I say, "Look at the picture: is it beautiful to you?" "No, it is not." "Well then, nothing can prove to you that it is beautiful."

I say to a man, "Four and four make eight." "Well, prove it," he says. "Does not your arithmetical sense jump to that conclusion?" "No." "Then it cannot be proved to you."

There are things, the comprehension of which when they are stated depends upon certain corresponding intellectual qualities; and if those qualities do not respond in you, then nothing can help you to see these things.

I remember how difficult it was for me to understand what was meant by "fine lines" when I first began the study of art. I could not tell what a "fine line" was. I thought it was probably a line that was not broad. I heard critics commenting upon pictures, and I wished I knew how to criticise pictures. They would say, "Look at the distribution of the parts! What symmetry! What fore-ground, middle-ground and distance! What gradations of color! What beautiful lights and shades!" I looked at the canvas, and could not make much out of it. I could see the "fore-ground," but I could not tell what the "middle-ground," or the "distance" was. So far as light and shade were concerned, I could not see much else but shade;—and all because my artistic sense had not been cultivated.

It was through a quiet familiarity with these things that

I came to have an insight into them. As soon as *I* changed, by culture, *pictures* seemed to change, too. And now when I look at a picture, I am not such a fool as to see merely what stares out from the canvas ; I see its finer and less obvious features.

There is a process by which men learn the qualities of things. This fact was recognized by the Saviour, when he said to the chief priests, the scribes and the rulers, "I am doing the works of God ; believe me for the truth that I am telling you, or believe me for my works' sake. If ye cannot believe, it is because ye are the children of the world. Ye are of your father, the devil. Ye live on a lower plane, and cannot comprehend the evidences of divinity, which are not arguments nor analogies, but the presentation of moral truth and moral beauty. If, when these are opened to your mind, they do not strike you as meaning divinity, there is no evidence further that can be presented to you, because you cannot be taught on spiritual subjects." While he was on earth,—and he had before him the most intelligent men, the men that were the most refined, the men that had been most developed in moral ideas, of all on the globe,—he could not teach them spiritual things until they had gained some experience of them ; and if he had lived three hundred, five hundred, eight hundred, a thousand or two thousand years, he would down to this day have taught only those who were competent to understand, by reason of their growth. The earth would have always followed the same law that it does now, the same law that he pointed out to them then, and we should have had to learn by stages, and rise accordingly.

But we should not even then have come to unity. There never will be absolute unity in respect to moral truths. Any truths which are susceptible of being made unitary to the whole human race must be very low, very elementary, very broad. Even in the consideration of physical truths there is but very little absolute unity—if any—in men. And when you take social and moral truths, still more when you take spiritual truths, they are of such a nature that they report themselves to each individual according to his conformation.

It is not probable that, taking the subtle truth of sound or color, any two persons in this house would see or hear it alike. This is not a speculation. The pilot on one of the ferry-boats can tell whether one or another engineer is down below. He has to run differently according to the dispositions of the engineers who are on duty. He said to me, "Well, So-and-so is slow; and if he is engineer I know that when I ring the bell he must have time before he reverses the engine; whereas, when my engineer (the one that runs mostly with me) is at his post, I can ring later, because his mind works quicker." It takes longer for one to receive the impression than for the other.

This is a curious illustration, in a homely way, of that which is understood among astronomers. The way in which men are organized is such that their power or readiness of vision varies. When there is a transit of Venus, or of some other planet, and twenty men look at it, the sensitiveness of some of them is such that they will see it quicker than the others, so that there will be an appreciable point of time between the seeing of one and the seeing of another. One being quick, and another slower, and another still slower, there are differences of seconds in the times when the contact reports itself to the different persons; and seconds are of great importance in such matters. Distinguished observers have "personal" equations, as they are called, by which they measure each other in this matter of swiftness and accuracy. One is at the top of the list, another is lower down on the list, and another is still lower down; and, in comparing the results of their observations, allowance has to be made for the personal equation of each. And that which is true of the nervous system in regard to sight is a thousand times more true with respect to the higher functions.

For example, take a person who is a roaring, jolly, coarse-fibered man. He loves his friend. Yes, a kind of love he has—that sort of love which he shows by coming up and slapping you on the back so hard as to knock you half across the sidewalk, and saying, "You are my friend: I like you!" Not far off, just over the way, is another nature to whom love is as an atmosphere of coming and going elements, full,

delicate, sweet, and fine, opening and expanding in every direction. And how different those two natures are ! How different to them the sound of the word "love" is ! To one it is a rude shout of good-nature ; to the other it is like the music of the spheres.

Take honor. What is honor ? A thousand different things, according to the moral stature or the gradation of the men by whom it is estimated. He that does not know what it is to be honorable cannot understand a discourse about honor.

Take any of the truths which belong to a man's social life. They vary according to the fiber, the education, or the competence of the persons before whom they are brought for adjudication. Disinterestedness, to be understood, requires first to have been felt in some degree. Self-sacrifice with gladness is an absolute mystery to men who never have known what it is. But those who have some personal knowledge of these qualities can interpret them.

Now to the great realm of religious truths belong the social and spiritual elements in man. They cannot be learned by the senses, nor by arguments, nor by demonstrations ; and the idea of a unity of belief is simply absurd. Each truth will be to every man what his own receiving nature makes it.

Here is a man whose nature is absolutely practical. His forehead retreats, but his brow juts out. He is immensely perceptive, but he has no reflective power. He is strong in his social affections, but he is weak in his moral nature. Truth to that man interprets itself according to his organization. It is with different men in this respect as it is with different kinds of glass in the transmission of light. For instance, when light comes in through a perfectly clear pane of glass, it is white light, combining all the various colors ; but if the glass is yellow, or red, or green, it lets in light of its own color, and that only. Men are like cathedral windows, kaleidoscopic with stained glass of all manner of colors and shades, each piece transmitting light of its own peculiar color ; and the revelation of truth is according to the faculties in the men themselves through which it reports itself. In some men the imagination largely predominates, and when the truth

comes to them it coruscates and fills their minds with all manner of glowing conceptions. It sends forth from them pulsations that roll like waves on some distant shore. The truth is multitudinous and large to them.

Where a man is intensely practical, if the truth is presented to him, he says, "State it to me exactly. Tell me just where it begins and just where it stops." He seems to think it is a thing that can be ciphered out on a slate. Many men appear to have the idea that all the truth in the universe can be written down in a little book, and called *the system of divinity*; and that when it is so written down, men can see it all alike. Why, such is the infinity, the almightiness, the profuseness, the multitudinousness, the variety in endless cycles, of truth, that there is not in the soul of man a competence to conceive of so vast and varied a realm; and if you could, you cannot express it in human language. If men saw moral truths just alike, it would be an absolute contradiction of all other facts as they exist in nature. It would be a mystery which we could not solve. If the Bible said that men were to see moral truths alike, it would be one of the most powerful arguments against its validity. So far from this being the case, all the way through the New Testament (particularly in the Epistles, which treat of specific subjects relating to the churches) there are endless allusions to differences of faith.

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." "God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"

There are abundant recognitions in Scripture of the infinite variations in men's conceptions and beliefs.

Therefore, the idea that there is a system of truth which has a certain head, a certain trunk, and certain parts, and that it can be put in such a form that everybody can see all that belongs to it just alike, is a fool's phantasy; and the whole world has been running after this *ignis fatuus*.

It is supposed that the world would be the gainer if there were One in Jerusalem to tell men just what to believe. It is thought that unity of truth might be secured under such circumstances. Well, how much has been gained by the

slight attempt to unitize the truth which has been made, not in Jerusalem, but in another quarter? How admirably the truth has become unitized by the efforts which were made at Rome! How perfectly every body in the world agrees now as to what the truth is! Before the last great Council the whole Catholic world was split up on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception; so the bishops gathered together from all nations, and it was determined that the Virgin was immaculate; and she was raised a few ranks higher; and the decree went out. What did the men, who did not believe it before the Council, do after it was stated to be a fact by the Council? They shut their mouths, and swallowed—that is all. They agreed that they would say that it was so; but do you suppose they believed it was so any more than they did before?

An old rich man is visited by a nephew who is his heir, and they sit down to the table, and meat is set before them, and the old man says, "That is a hedgehog." The butler has whispered to the nephew, and said, "Don't you dispute the old man. Agree with him in everything. Whatever he says, you say." And when the old man says, "That is a hedgehog, my friend," the nephew says, "Yes, it is a hedgehog." That is like the unity which is produced by Councils.

When, later, it was determined that, not the church, and not any council of the church, but the pope himself, in his own proper person, was infallible, do you suppose that Antonelli believed it? Of course he accepted it; but do you suppose he *believed* it? Do you suppose that Newman, who was one of the acutest men in England, and who contested it with a tongue like fire—do you suppose that he believed it, because he gathered up his feet in bed, saying, "I won't fight it"? Do you believe in miracles of such a sort? I do not. The idea of unitizing beliefs by any authority or power has no foundation in reason or fact. You cannot make men one in belief until you make them one in psychological formation. The trouble is in human nature itself. Men are so different in their make-up with regard to faculties and their functions that the same truth coming through one man shines more

blue than yellow, coming through another man shines more red than blue, and so on.

It is the glory of truth that it is voluminous ; that it is too large to be compassed by one human mind ; that its variations, as between man and man, are so many ; and that differences of belief as they exist, if accepted by the church in a spirit of love, come nearer to expressing universality of truth than anything else. Blessed be the variations that bring us nearer to union than those authorities which wipe out variations under the stupid pretence of wooden-headed unity. It is a mistake to suppose that if the Saviour had remained in Jerusalem his presence would have unitized men in belief. It would have performed no service of that kind.

It was expedient that Jesus should return to the heavenly estate, to the spiritual realm, in order that the imagination of the whole human family, now instructed by some historical metes and bounds, might be put in possession of definite facts, of the materials that were authoritative, and of the generic ideal or conception called *Christ*. Having ascended to heaven, he could really be nearer, through the imagination, to the race, than he could have been if he had remained in Jerusalem. That is a far-off land, and if Christ were alive there to-day, I should think of him by my lower faculties ; and connected with my thoughts of him would be thoughts of leagues, of days, and of traveling by land and by sea. He is nearer to me now than he would be if he were in Jerusalem.

The child is in Africa among the savage tribes. She is far, far away, as the wet-eyed mother knows every night when she prays for her. But by-and-by tidings come, "God has taken her"; and behold, from that day the child is right overhead, and the mother almost whispers to her. Ten thousand persons know that friends who have gone to heaven now seem nearer to them, really, than when they lived almost in their very presence on earth, or when they were separated by time and distance. And Jesus is nearer to his people to-day than he would be if he were in Jerusalem. The imagination is a better interpreter of the Lord Jesus Christ to you than your senses could possibly have been.

It is expedient for the race that the imagination should be put upon exercise practically. Men seem to think that the imagination is one of the lighter faculties; that it may be used sportively in alliance with sensuous beauty: but the imagination is to be used in connection with the reason as well as the senses; and these elements combined give higher results than can be attained by the senses alone. The whole race goes from the lower to the higher planes of life through the imagination.

Through the aid of imagination men gain much more comprehensive and satisfying views of the invisible God than they could get of him through the senses if he were visible before them. Idolatry, the worship of a visible God, has always been bad, whether the idol was in the shape of grotesque stone, or whether it was in the shape of a rare Apollo, or whether it was in the shape of a church, or whether it was in the shape of a creed. Any god that men can fix their lower senses upon, and rest, is bad for the race. The necessity of men to lift themselves above their lower range of faculties, and make their life in the realm of the invisible, out of the reach of the senses, and develop their nature up and away from the physical and material—that is the grand civilizing and Christianizing necessity of the race. And to have our Saviour present with us would be to smother those instincts on which our elevation and spiritualization depend; while to have him absent from us in Heaven is to have above us a bright flame like a blaze of fire, circuiting higher and higher to where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

Christ said that it was expedient that he should go away, and that if he did not go the Comforter would not come. Blessed word! And yet it is but a classification of the higher words, *Holy Spirit*. It is a blessed word because if there is anything that we need in this world, it is comforting. There are gods of love, there are gods of wine, there are gods of war, there are gods of lust, there are gods of cruelty, there are gods of government and law, there are gods of equity and justice, there are gods of abundance; but that which we need more than anything else is a God of motherhood, a God of patience, a God of gentleness, a God of forbearance, a God of

forgiveness, a God of love in its fullest potency, a God that can brood, and wait, and help, and comfort while helping. And that word to me sounds like one sweet bell in a whole jangle of discordant bells.

Sometimes, in the summer, when the chimes of old Trinity are ringing over in New York, one bell sounds across the water to my window clearer and sweeter than all the rest; and in the Bible there is no other expression that to me is so sweet as "The God of all comfort;" and there is no word that is sweeter to me than that word "Comforter" which Jesus employed.

He said, "The Comforter cannot come if I do not depart." God comforting the world—the erring, the sinning, the wasted and the wasting world! What a consoling thought! The world needs a God to comfort it. And as, when the little child falls in its play, and cries, the nurse runs out from the household, and picks it up, and comes back with her homely face irradiated, wiping the tears from its eyes; so God shall lift us from the ground when we fall, and wipe the tears from our eyes. It is just such a God that we want.

The Spirit; the Holy Spirit; the One who stands over against those subtle elements in the human soul which we call the spiritual instinct or sentiment—not a God of the body, of the basilar reason, or of the social affections, but a God higher than that, who is interpreted to us by the higher forms of moral sense—this Holy Spirit comes to take the place of Christ, and open the doors of the understanding through these highest intuitions, and give light and direction to our interior nature, and enable us to triumph over death, and crown us sons in the kingdom of God. And this is infinitely better than that Christ should have continued on the earth in his physical form.

Now, men and brethren, how blessed it is to feel that the heaven is filled by One who is interpreted to our spirit by historical sympathies as he never could have been interpreted to us in Jerusalem, where he would have had to walk the streets as men do, where he would have had to eat and drink as men do, and where he would have had to sleep as men do. In the

spirit-land, whither we are going, and from whence we are looking for the coming of our Saviour—there, immortal, in the blessedness of unchanging youth and power, Jesus waits for us ; and there is not a long day's journey between us and him. The distance is not even so great as that which must be gone over to send a letter from the Post-Office in New York to the Post-Office in Brooklyn. No thought emerges from your soul that does not go instantly to him. You are near to him because he is near to you. There are no distances in spirituality. You are with the Lord, and he is forever with you. You are in him, and he is in you. By your feeling, by your inspirations, by the very intents of your heart, you are in his presence ; and it is an exceeding great consolation to believe that as one and another of your household go out from you, they go into the arms of Christ.

Is there anything sweeter to grief and sorrow than that passage where the New Testament, sweet book of the soul, speaks of dying ? Let Tuscanized Romans talk of death ; let heathen mythologies come to us with skulls, and cross-bones, and hideous images of dying, of the monster Death, of the tyrant Death, of the scythe-armed Death, of a grim and terrible fate ; but what terror can any of these representations have for us when we have for our encouragement and hope the promises of the New Testament !

On a summer's day, the gentle western wind brings in all the sweets of the field and the garden ; and the child, overtaken by joy, comes back weary, and climbs for sport into the mother's lap ; and before he can sport he feels the balm of rest stealing over him, and lays his curly head back upon her arm ; and look ! he goes to sleep ; hush ! he has gone to sleep ; and all the children stand smiling. How beautiful it is to see a child drop asleep on its mother's arm ! And it is said, " He fell asleep in Jesus." Is there anything so high, so noble, or divine, as the way in which the New Testament speaks of dying ? How near death is, and how beautiful !

If you have lost companions, children, friends, you have not lost them. They followed the Pilot. They went through airy channels, unknown and unsearchable, and they are with the Lord ; and you are going to be with him, too. I die to

go, not to Jerusalem, but to the New Jerusalem. I die, not to wait in the rock-ribbed sepulcher, which shall hold me sure; I die, that when this body is dropped I shall have a place, in the inward fullness of my spiritual power, with the Lord.

Then welcome gray hairs! they come as white banners that wave from the other and higher life. Welcome infirmities! they are but the loosening of the cords preparatory to taking down the tabernacle. Welcome troubles! they are but the signs that we are crossing the sea, and that not far away is our home—that house of our Father in which are many mansions, where dwells Jesus, the loved and all-loving. And let us rejoice that he has gone from the body, that he may be ever present in the Spirit, and that ere long we may be with him.



### PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE bless thee, thou All-comprehending God, that we need not explain or make known our mistakes to thee, as if thou wert ignorant of them. We do not draw near to thy door as paupers come begging; nor do we confess our sins as men who show their ills and ails.

Thou dost not desire to humiliate us. We hear thee saying, Henceforth I call you not slaves, but friends. It is with this call in our ear that we draw near to thee this morning. Thou nearest, thou best of friends, before whom we are perfectly known, and to whom we need not rehearse anything—thou art in sympathy with us, understanding us better than we understand ourselves, knowing our frame, our weakness, our infirmities, our sinfulness, or struggles, our aspirations, all the things in which we fail, or achieve but partial success. All our life is known to thee; and we rejoice that thou art so large in thyself that thou canst take us as we are, and not compel us to be transformed before thou canst accept us at all. We are before thee as plants in a garden, upon which the gardener bestows all pains, that they may come up; freeing them from every assault and evil, that he may bring forth from them the blossom and the fruit.

Thou art the Husbandman; thou art the Gardener, and thou art taking us in the seed and planting us; thou art rearing us with infinite care and kindness; and we mourn that the requital is so poor. Yet, we rejoice to believe that our imperfections, our poor growth, our dullness, the unfragrance of our blossoms, are acceptable to

thee. There is a better life, there is a warmer clime, there are nobler conditions; and to those thou wilt yet one day transplant us.

How many there are that see only the leaves now, but shall see the blossoms by and by! How many there are that see no fruitage here, but shall see glorious fruitage in presence of our God! It is to the heavenly land that we look, taking refuge in our hope from all the disappointments and poor accomplishments of this life—for who among all the men that live can speak of his perfectness? and who can God take because he is perfectly good? All men lie upon thy bosom as children upon the arms of a nurse. All are enfolded in thy bosom, and grow by thy mercy. By the grace of God we are what we are in everything that is excellent. By thy grace comes patience with our infirmities and our imperfections. By thy grace comes the forgiveness of our sins, and our adoption into the family of Christ, and all the joy of the Spirit. We praise thy name for the revelation of thy nature. We bless thee for all the light and hope and gladness that there is in the Holy Ghost. And if there are any in thy presence this morning who have entered upon the divine life recognizing thy presence, help them to give forth silently, from their innermost souls, those thanks and those sympathies which are sweet to thee, no matter how imperfect they are.

We beseech of thee, O God, to accept every good thing, everything which we desire to have good, everything which in any manner is good; and wait not for our perfectness, but take us in our poorness. Take every heart that would be pure, and that strives for purity; everyone that would find rest, and that seeks it earnestly; everyone that desires to be set free from that evil which is in himself, and is struggling against it. We beseech of thee that by thy Spirit thou wilt inflame our ambition for things spiritual, and our desire for nearness to thee.

Draw near to any who have not recognized thee, who have no secret strife, who are too much at rest, too content with the sensuous life of the body, and the outward things of the world. Take not from them these things which are good, but teach them how inferior they are to that higher joy which is prepared for those who see God, and dwell in him.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt bring more and more out into light, from twilight and from darkness, any who are wandering, or have wandered from the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. Bring back to truth, to duty, and to eager ambition for things right and high, any who have stumbled and fallen.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt have compassion not only upon those whom we compassionate, but upon all—upon those whom men neglect, and upon those whom men despise. Blessed be thy name that the humanities of the universe are not such as prevail among men, who devour one another, and selfishly grind each other, and forgive little, but exact much. We rejoice that the Heart that is sovereign, and knows all things in heaven above and in the earth beneath, loves even unto suffering and unto death, and carries our burdens rather than imposes burdens upon us, and for our sake yields his own self.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt have compassion upon the vicious, upon criminals, upon those who are cast out from the sympathy of life. O Lord God, is there no restoring grace? Is the work done? Are there no doors by which the fallen may return to virtue? We commend to thee all who are degraded. We desire to have such a sense of thy wisdom and of thy cleansing power, that we may commend to thee in all faith every wanderer and every wrong doer in the hope that thou canst find what man cannot—the way of reaching and purifying the heart.

We pray that thy Spirit may be shed abroad with more and more efficacy; and since thou hast made thy children to be the lights of the world, grant that our light may so shine that men, seeing our good works, shall glorify our Father which is in heaven. And from the experience of thy people may men draw hope and courage, and venture upon that Saviour who is so precious to us.

We pray that thou wilt comfort any who are in affliction, and lift upon them the light of thy countenance. Relieve all burdens, or give strength to bear them, to those who are oppressed thereby. Guide all those who wander. Give certitude to all those who are perplexed. Show the way of duty to all those who seek it and do not find it! And may thy kingdom come and thy will be done in the hearts of all.

We pray for the churches of this city, for the churches of the great city near us, and for all the churches of this whole land and of the world. We pray that the power of truth as it is in Jesus Christ may be augmented a thousand fold, and that that day may speedily come when all the earth shall see thy salvation; when nations shall be brought from barbarism to civilization; when men of no faith shall have faith in the veritable God; when truth shall prevail; when love shall be in the ascendant; when the earth shall be redeemed from animalism; when every man shall sit under his own vine and fig-tree; and when peace shall smile upon all the race. Lord, thou hast promised it, and in thine own time thou wilt perform it; but make haste, we beseech of thee, and cause the revolving days to speed until that day of prediction shall come, and joy shall reign upon the earth even as it reigns in heaven.

And to the Father, the Son and the Spirit, shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

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
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